Gastric Bands Explode In Popularity, But May Soon Be Obsolete

Despite a five-fold increase in the US over the last five years, the days of gastric band procedures are numbered, thanks to the investigation into nonsurgical and less expensive alternatives, states an analyst for research and consulting firm GlobalData.

According to the business intelligence company, the number of gastric restrictive procedures performed in the US skyrocketed from 24,452 in 2007 to 124,466 in 2012 – an increase of over 500% – but this figure will plummet following the US market introduction of new, innovative technologies, such as the intragastric balloons.

Joseph Gregory, GlobalData's Analyst covering Surgical Devices, believes that while gastric band procedures' impressive growth may continue in the short term, safety concerns, among other issues, will see bariatric procedures become a forgotten solution to obesity:

"Bariatric procedures come with a risk of infection and the potential need to subsequently re-operate or remove the gastric band," says Gregory. "Close to 27% of all gastric restrictive procedures in 2012 were for either a revision or complete removal of the band. In addition to these health risks, the procedures are also associated with steep costs, ranging anywhere from $14,000 to $20,000."

The substantial drawbacks to gastric band operations have prompted the emergence of innovative alternatives – the most promising of which is the intragastric balloon. Inserted orally, the device is navigated through to the stomach and is inflated until it occupies the desired amount of space. The procedure is currently available in Europe, South America and other parts of the world, but is not yet approved for use in the US.

Gregory states: "Intragastric balloon technologies will undoubtedly up-end the current surgical interventional market through their strategic positioning in the treatment regimen. This non-invasive procedure is going to appeal to patients willing to undergo surgery, as well as those patients that opt out of going under the knife.

"Logically patients are more likely to try another noninvasive intervention after failing a regimen of diet, exercise or even pharmacological supplements, before they subject themselves to the risks and potential complications of undergoing surgery."

Additionally, manufacturers of these intragastric devices are likely to keep their costs down to appeal to the insurance companies and consumers looking to pay out

of pocket. In Europe for example, procedural costs for a gastric restrictive procedure ranges from €6,000 to €7,000, whereas an intragastric procedure costs approximately €5,000.

“If intragastric balloons are able to obtain comparable excess weight loss improvements to gastric restrictive procedures in long-term clinical trials, they have a better chance of being covered by insurance more quickly.

While the US bariatric surgical intervention market has enjoyed a prosperous decade of increased procedural volumes and low competition, that fulfillment is expected to end soon as innovative technologies, like intragastric balloons, begin to enter the market, which could be as early as late 2015.”

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